

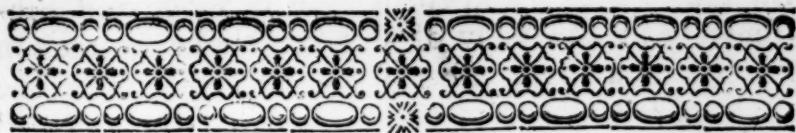
THE
High Expediency,
Or rather
The absolute Necessity
OF
A set Form of Prayer.
A
SERMON

Preach'd by Dr. SOUTH.



Printed in the YEAR MDCCXX.

EXED III



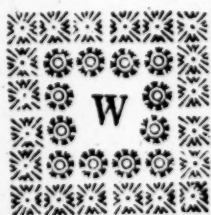
The Excellency and Usefulness

O F

Set Forms of Prayer, &c.

ECCLES. 5. 2.

Be not rash with thy Mouth, and let not thine Heart be hasty to utter any thing before GOD : For GOD is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth : Therefore let thy Words be few.



WE have here the wisest of Men instructing us how to behave ourselves before God in his own House, and especially when we address to him in the most important of all Duties, which is Prayer. *Solomon* had the Honour to be spoken to by God himself, and therefore in all likelihood none more fit to teach us how to speak to God. A great Privilege certainly for Dust and Ashes to be admitted to. And therefore it will concern us to manage it so, that in these our Approaches to the King of Heaven, his Goodness may not cause us to forget his Greatness, nor, as it is but too usual for Subjects to use Privilege against Prerogative, his Honour suffer by his Condescension.

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In the Words we have these *Three* Things, I. That whosoever appears in the House of God, and particularly in the Way of Prayer, ought to reckon himself in a more especial Manner plac'd in the Sight and Presence of God. II. That the vast and infinite Distance betwixt God and him, ought to create in him all imaginable Aw and Reverence in such his Addressees to God. III. That this Reverence required of him, is to consist in a serious Preparation of his Thoughts, and a sober Government of his Expressions; neither is his Mouth to be rash, nor his Heart to be hasty in uttering any Thing before God, but his Words to be few. These Things are evidently contained in the Words, and do as evidently contain the whole Sense of them. But I shall gather them all into this one Proposition, namely, *That Premeditation of Thought and Brevity of Expression, are the great Ingredients of that Reverence that is required to a pious, acceptable and devout Prayer.*

For the better handling of which, we will first consider how Prayer works upon, or prevails with God for obtaining the Things we pray for. And the Way by which Prayer prevails with God is wholly different from that by which it prevails with Men. 1st, It prevails not with God by Way of Information. With Men indeed this is common, and with wise Men the chief, and should be the only Way of obtaining what we ask of them. We lay before them our Wants and Indigencies, and the Misery of our Condition, which being made known to them, induces them to do that for us which we desire. But it is not so in our Addressees to God; for he knows our Wants and our Condition better than we ourselves, *Matth. vi. 8. Your Father knoweth what Things*

you

you have need of before you ask him. And Psal. cxxxix.
 2. *Thou understandest my Thoughts as far off.* God knows our Thoughts before the Heart that conceives them ; And how then can he who is but of Yesterday suggest any Thing new to that eternal Mind ? How can Ignorance inform Omniscience ?

2dly, Neither does Prayer prevail by Way of Perswasion, or working upon the Affections, as thereby to move him to Pity or Compassion. This indeed is the most usual and effectual Way to prevail with Men ; for the Generality are one Part Reason, but much more Affection ; so that one of a voluble Tongue and a dextrous Insinuation may do what he will with vulgar Minds, and with wise Men too at their weak Times. But God, who is void of Passion or Affection as he is of Quantity or Corporeity, is not to be dealt with this Way. He values not our Rhetorick nor pathetical Harangues. He is an infinite almighty Reason, a pure Act all intellect, the first Mover, and therefore not to be moved or wrought upon himself. In all Passion the Mind suffers, but absolute Perfection is impassible.

3dly, Much less is God to be prevail'd upon by Importunity, tho with Men this also is not unusual ; a notable Instance of which we have in *Luke xviii. 4, 5.* where the unjust Judge being with a restless Vehemence sued to for Justice, says thus within himself, *Tho I fear not God nor regard Man, yet because this Widow troubleth me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.* And how often are Beggars relieved only for their eager and rude Importunity ? Not that the Person who relieves them is thereby informed of their real Want, nor yet moved to pity them by all their Cry and Cant, but to rid himself

from their vexatious Noise and Din. But this Way is farther from prevailing with God than the former ; for as Omniscience is not to be informed, so neither is Omnipotence to be wearied. Men may tire themselves by their Prayers, but God is not to be tired.

But then you will ask, What Way is Prayer prevalent with God, so as to procure the Things we pray for? *Ans.* It is the fulfilling of that Condition upon which God has freely promised to convey his Blessings to Men. God of his own absolute good Will and Pleasure has thought fit to appoint this as the Means by which he will supply and answer the Wants of Mankind. For Instance, should a Prince declare to any one of his Subjects, that if he shall appear before him every Morning in his Bed-Chamber, he shall receive a great Sum of Money ; his Appearance does not move his Prince to give him such a Sum, no, he only performs the Condition of the Promise, and thereby acquires a Right to the Thing promised. He does indeed thereby engage his Prince to give him the Sum, tho he does not persuade him, or rather the Prince's own Justice and Veracity is an Engagement upon him to perform his Promise to him who fulfills the Conditions of it.

But then you'll say, That upon this Ground it will follow that when we obtain any Thing of God by Prayer, we have it upon Claim of Justice, and not by Way of Gift as a free Result of his Bounty.

I answer, Both these are very well consistent ; for tho he who makes a Promise upon a certain Condition, is bound in Justice upon the fulfilling of that Condition to perform his Promise, yet it was perfectly Grace and Goodness, Bounty and free Mer-

cy that first induced him to make the Promise, and especially on such a Condition; *If we confess our Sins,* says the Apostle, 1 *Joh. i. 9. God is faithfull and just to forgive us our Sins.* Can any thing be more the Effect of free Grace than the Forgiveness of Sins? And yet it is certain from this and many more Places of Scripture, it is promised upon Condition of a penitent hearty Confession of them and forsaking them, and then God is obliged by his Faithfulness and Justice to make good his Promise; so he that prays for a thing as God has appointed him, has a Right to it, not by Meritor Condignity either in the Prayer itself, or the Person of him who makes it, but from God's Veracity, Truth and Justice.

We have Account of this whole Matter from God's own Mouth, *Psal. 50. Call upon me,* says God, *in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver thee.* These are the Terms upon which God answers Prayers, that without such a previous Declaration made on God's Part, a Person in Trouble might pray his Heart out, and yet God not be obliged by all his Prayers either in Justice or Honour to deliver him. Prayer procures Deliverance from Trouble, just as *Naaman's* dipping himself seven Times in *Jordan* procured him a Deliverance from his Leprosie, not by any Virtue in itself adequate to so great an Effect to be sure, but because it was appointed by God as the Condition of his Recovery: Let this therefore be the Ground work of what we are to say on this Subject, that Prayer prevails with God neither by way of Information nor yet of Perswasion, much less by Importunity, and least of all by any Worth in the Prayer itself, but solely and intirely by and upon

upon God's Appointment as the stated Condition on which he will dispense his Blessings to Mankind.

But it may be enquired whence is it that Prayer rather than any other thing comes to be appointed by God for this Condition? *Answer*, Tho God's Will be a sufficient Reason of its own Determinations, and more than a sufficient Answer to all our Inquiries; yet since God in his infinite Wisdom still adapts Means to Ends, and never appoints a thing to any Use but what it has a particular and a natural Fitness for, I therefore presume this may be the Reason why Prayer before all other things should be appointed to this noble Use of being the Condition and glorious Conduit whereby to derive the Bounties of Heaven upon the Sons of Men, because Prayer of all other Acts of a rational Nature does most peculiarly qualify a Man to be a fit Object of the divine Favour, by being most eminently and properly an Act of Dependence upon God; since to pray or beg a thing of another imports these two Things, 1. That the Person praying stands in need of some Good which he is not able by any Power of his own to procure to himself. 2. That he acknowledges it in the Power and Pleasure of the Person to whom he prays to confer it upon him, and this is that which Men call, to depend.

Some may reply, There is an universal Dependence of all Things upon God, forasmuch as he is the Fountain and Source of all Beings, and who supports them by the Word of his Power, and consequently that this Dependence belongs indifferently to the wicked as well as to the just, whose Prayer is an Abomination to God. The Answer to this is obvious, That the Dependence here spoke of is meant

meant not of a natural but moral Dependence ; the first is necessary, the other voluntary, the first common to all, the other proper to the pious ; the first respects God barely as a Creator, the other addresses to him also as a Father : Now what can be more rationally thought of for the properest Instruments to bring down God's Blessings upon the World than such a Temper of Mind as makes a Man disown all Ability in himself to supply his own Wants, and at the same time own a transcendent Fulness and Sufficiency in God to do it for him ? What can be more agreeable to all Principles both of Reason and Religion, than that a Creature endued with Understanding and Will should acknowledge that Dependence upon his Maker by a free Act of Choice, which other Creatures have upon him only by Necessity of Nature ?

There is an Objection more, That Prayer is said to prevail by Frequency, *Luk. xviii. 7.* and by Fervency, *Ja. v. 16.* *Ans.* Two Things, 1. That wheresoever God is said to answer Prayers either for their Frequency or Fervency, it is spoken of him according to the manner of Man. Thus you see how Prayer prevails with God, namely as a Condition appointed by God for that purpose, and no otherwise ; and for that Reason it is singled out of all other Acts of a rational Nature to be this Condition, namely, because 'tis the grand Instance of such a Nature's Dependence upon God. We shall now, from the same Principle, infer upon what Account the highest Reverence of God is so indispensibly required of us in Prayer, and all sort of Irreverence so diametrically opposite and destructive of the very Nature of it, and it is this, that in what Degree any one lays a-

side

side his Reverence of God, in the same he also quites his Dependence upon him, forasmuch as in every irreverent Act, Man treats God as if he had no need of him, and behaves himself as if he were self-sufficient; this is the natural Language and Import of all Irreverence. Now in all our Addressses either to God or Man by Speech; our Reverence to them must consist of, and shew itself in these two Things.

1. A carefull Regulation of our Thoughts that are to dictate and govern our Words, which is done by Premeditation. 2. A due ordering of our Words that are to proceed from and express our Thoughts, which is done by Pertinence and Brevity of Expression. *David* directing his Prayer to God, joins these two together as the two great integral Parts of it, *Psal. xix. 14. Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord.* So that it seems his Prayer consisted of these two Things, *Meditation* and *Expression*, as it were the Matter and Form of that noble Composure, there being no mention at all of Distortion of Face, sanctified Grimace, solemn Wink, or Foaming at the Mouth, and the like; all which are Circumstances of Prayer of a later Date, and brought into Request by those fantastick Zealots who had a Way of praying as astonishing to the Eyes as to the Ears of those that heard them.

Well then, the first Ingredient of a pious and reverential Prayer is a previous Regulation of the Thoughts, as the Text expresses it most emphatically, *Let not thy Heart be hasty to utter any thing before God,* i. e. in other Words, *Let not thy Heart conceive and bring forth together, let it not venture to throw out it's crude, extemporary, sudden and misshapen Conceptions*

Conceptions in the Face of infinite Perfection. Let not thy Heart conceive and bring forth together, this is monstrous and unnatural; all Abortion is from Infirmary and Defect, and Time is required to form the Issue of the Mind as well as that of the Body. Be the Invention never so fruitfull, yet in the Mind, as in the Earth, that which is cast into it must lye hid and covered for a while before it can be fit to shoot forth. These are the Methods of Nature, and it is seldom but the Acts of Religion conform to them.

He who is to pray, would he seriously judge of the Work that is before him, has mote to consider of than either his Heart can hold, or his Head well turn itself to. Prayer is one of the greatest and hardest Works that a Man has to do in this World; and was ever any thing difficult or glorious atchieved by a sudden Cast of a Thought, a flying Stricture of the Imagination? Presence of Mind is indeed good, but Haste is not so: And therefore in Prayer to pretend to Reverence, when there is no Premeditation, is both Impudence and Contradiction. Now this *Premeditation* ought to respect these three Things, 1. The Person whom we pray to. 2. The Matter of our Prayers. And 3. The Order and Disposition of them.

And 1st, For the Person whom we pray to. In our Addresses to him we must endeavour to bring our Thoughts as near to God as we can, by considering such of his divine Perfections as have, by their Effects, in a great measure manifested themselves to our Senses, and in a much greater, to the Discourses of our Reason: As 1. Consider how great and glorious a Being that must needs be, that raised so

vast and beautifull Fabrick as this of the World, out of nothing, with the Breath of his Mouth, and will reduce it with the same to nothing again.

Next, Consider his infinite Knowledge, which looks through and through the most secret of our Thoughts, ransacks every Corner of the Heart, ponders the most inward Designs and Ends of the Soul in all a Man's Actions, who observes the Postures, the Frame and Motion of thy Mind in all thy Approaches to him, whose piercing Eye it is impossible to elude or escape by all the Tricks and Arts of the subtlest and most refined Hypocrisy. Consider the fiery and implacable Jealousy he has for his Honour, and above all that he will in a most peculiar manner be honoured of all those who draw nigh to him, and will by no Means suffer himself to be mocked and affronted under a Pretence of being worshipped, nor endure that a wretched, contemptible, sinfull Creature, who is but a Piece of living Dust at best, should at the same time bend the Knee to him, and spit in his Face; and now consider that this is the God whom thou prayest to, and whom thou usest with such Indignity in every unworthy Prayer thou puttest up to him; every bold, sawcy and familiar Word, that upon Confidence of being one of God's Elect thou presumest to debase so great a Majesty with.

And for an Instance of a dreadfull Curse that attends such a daring Irreverence, consider how God used *Nadab* and *Abihu* for offering to venture strange Fire before him; and that every unhallowed unfitting Prayer is a strange Fire, a Fire that will be sure to destroy the Offering, tho Mercy should spare the Offerer. Consider these Things seriously,

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riously, severely and deeply, till the Consideration of them affects thy Heart and humbles thy Spirit with such awfull Apprehensions of thy Maker, and such abject Reflections upon thy self as may lay thee in Dust before him, and know that the lower thou fallest, the higher will thy Prayer rebound ; and that thou art never so fit to pray to God as when a Sense of thy own Unworthiness makes thee ashamed to speak to him.

The *second* Object of our *Premeditation* is, the Matter of our Prayers ; for as we are to consider whom we are to pray to, so we are to consider also what we are to pray for, and this requires no ordinary Application of Thought. Men's Prayers are generally dictated by their Desires, and their Desires are the Issue of their Affections, and their Affections are most part influenced by their Corruptions. The first constituent Principle of a well conceived Prayer, is to know what not to pray for, which the Scripture tells us some do not, while they pray for what they may spend upon their Lusts, *Ja. iv. 3.* asking such Things, as it is a Contumely to God to hear, and Damnation to themselves to receive. No Man is to pray for any thing either sinfull or directly tending to Sin. No Man is to pray for a Temptation, much less to desire God to be his Tempter, which he would certainly be, should he at the Instance of any Man's Prayer administer Fewel to his sinfull or absurd Appetites : Nor is any one to ask of God Things trivial and beneath the Majesty of Heaven to be concerned about, nor to pray for Things superfluous and extravagant, such as Wealth, Greatness and Honour, which we are so far from being warranted to beg of God, that we are to

beg his Grace to despise and undervalue them.

The Things we are to pray for, are 1. Things either of absolute Necessity, Or 2. Things of unquestionable Charity; of the first sort are all spiritual Graces required of us as the absolute Conditions of our Salvation, such as Repentance, Love, Faith, Charity, Temperance, and all other Virtues that are either the Parts or Principles of a pious Life, and nothing comes so easily from Heaven as those Things that will assuredly bring us to it; the Spirit dictates all such Petitions, and God himself is first the Author, and then the Fulfiller of them, owning and accepting them both as our Duty and his own Production.

The other Things to be prayed for, are Things of manifest and unquestionable Charity, such as Health, Peace, Success in our honest Labours, and a competent Measure of the Comforts of this Life, and even these but conditionally, and with perfect Resignation to the Will and Wisdom of the sovereign Disposer of all that belongs to us. In fine, Nothing can be fit for us to pray for, but what is fit and honourable for our great Mediator to intercede for. Dare any make him, who is Holiness and Purity it self, an Advocate and Sollicitor for his Lusts? Him, who was nothing but Meekness and Humility, his Provider for such Things as feed his Pride and flush his Ambition? No certainly, nothing can be fit to proceed out of our Mouth, but what is fit to pass through his.

Third Thing that calls for our Premeditation to our Prayers, is the Order and Disposition of them: Tho he do not command us to set off our Prayers with Dress and Artifice, yet he requires that we should

should manage them with Sense and Reason : Finess is not expected, but Decency is. Tho we cannot declaim as Orators, yet he will have us to speak like Men, and tender him the Result of that Understanding that constitutes a rational Nature. But what I have to say upon this Particular, shall be cast into these following Assertions. 1. Nothing can express our Reverence to God that would pass for Irreverence amongst Men. Let any Subject tender his Prince a Petition fraught with Nonsense and Incoherence, Confusion and Impertinence, what can he expect but a deaf Ear, or a frowning Eye, or at least, by a gracious Oblivion, to forgive the Person and forget the Petition.

2. Nothing absurd and irrational, and such as a wise Man would despise, can be acceptable to God in Prayer. *Eccles. v. 4. Solomon tells us, that God has no Pleasure in Fools.* It is the Simplicity of the Heart and not of the Head that is the best Inditer of our Petitions. That which proceeds from the Head is undoubtedly the Sacrifice of Fools. And God is never more weary of Sacrifice than when a Fool is the Priest and Folly the Oblation.

3. Nothing rude, slight and careless, or indeed less than the very best that a Man can offer, can please God in Prayer. *If you offer the Blind for Sacrifice, is it not evil? If ye offer the Lame and the Sick, is it not evil? Offer it now to thy Governour, and see whether he will be pleased with thee, or accept thy Person, saith the Lord of Hosts, Mal. i. 8.* God expects a Return of his own Gifts. And he who has Parts to raise himself, but none to imploy in the Worship of God that gave them, falls directly under the Dint of that Curse, *Cursed be the Deceiver that hath a Male in his*
Flock,

Flock, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt Thing. Where God has bestowed Judgement, Learning and Utterance, he will not endure that Men should be accurate in their Discourse and loose in their Devotions, or think that the Author of every good and perfect Gift will be pleased with Ramble, Bable and Tautology. Whosoever presumes to pray to God without Premeditation, cannot be said to approach God so properly as to break in upon him; and he who does so, cannot expect that the Success that follows his Prayers should be greater than the Preparation that goes before them.

Now, from what has been discoursed of the first and grand Qualification of a pious and devout Prayer, to wit, *Premeditation of Thought*, What can more naturally and usefully be inferred, as the high Expediency, or rather the absolute Necessity of a set Form of Prayer to guide our Devotions by? We have lived in an Age that has despised, contradicted and counteracted all the Principles and Practices of the primitive Christians; there being no Church yet of any Account in the Christian World, but what has governed its publick Worship of God by a Liturgy, or set Form of Prayer: Yet these enthusiastick Innovators, the bold and blind Reformers of all Antiquity, and wiser than the whole Catholick Church besides, introduced into the Room of it a sawcy, senseless, extemporary Way of speaking to God, affirming that this was a praying by the Spirit, and that all set Forms was a stinting of it. A Pretence popular and plausible enough with such Idiots as take the Sound of Words for the Sense of them. But for the Confutation of this, I shall advance this one Assertion, in direct Contradiction to that, namely,
That

That the Praying by a set Form is not a stinting of the Spirit, and the Praying extempore is truly and properly so.

For the proving of which, what it is to pray by the Spirit, a Thing much talkt of, but little understood by these who are the greatest Pretenders to it: It includes these two Things. 1. A Praying with the Heart, which is sometimes called the Spirit or inner Man, and so is properly opposed to hypocritical Lip-devotions, in which the Heart or Spirit does not go along with a Man's Words. 2. It includes in it also a Praying according to the Rules prescribed by God's holy Spirit, and held forth to us in his revealed Word, which Word was both dictated and confirmed by this Spirit, and so it is opposed to the Praying unlawfully or unwarrantably, and that either in respect of the Matter or Manner of our Prayers, as when we desire of God such Things, or in such a Way as the Spirit of God speaking in his holy Word, does by no Means warrant or approve of.

So that to pray by the Spirit, signifies neither more or less, but to pray knowingly, heartily and affectionately, for such Things and in such a Manner as the Holy Ghost in Scripture either commands or allows of. As for any other Kind of Praying by the Spirit, there is none. And if some say, as they both impudently and blasphemously do, that to pray by the Spirit, is to have the Spirit immediately inspiring them, and by such Inspiration speaking within them, and so dictating their Prayers to them; let them either produce plain Scripture, or do a Miracle to prove this by. But till then, he who considers what Kind of Prayers these Pretenders to the Spirit have been notable for, will find that they have as little Cause

Cause to father their Prayers as their Practices upon the Spirit of God.

This Way of Praying by the Spirit, as they call it, was begun by a Popish Priest, who feigning himself a Protestant, and a Zealot of the highest Form, set up this new spiritual Way of Praying, with a Design to bring the People first to a Contempt, and then to an utter Hatred and Disuse of the Common-Prayer, which he still reviled as only a Translation of the Mass, thereby to distract Mens Minds, and to divide the Church: And this he did with such Success, that we have lived to see the Effects of his Labours, in utter Subversion both of Church and State. Which hellish Negotiation, when this malicious Hypocrite came to *Rome* to give the Pope an Account of, he received of him, besides a thousand Thanks, two thousand Ducats. So that now you see the original of this great extempore Way of Praying.

Another was one of the greatest Monsters of Men that ever lived, and actually in League with the Devil, was by the Confession of all that heard him the most excellent at this great extempore Way of Praying by the Spirit, none was able to compare with him: But surely, he that would ascribe the Prayers of such a Wretch, made up of Adulteries, Incest, Witchcraft, and other Villanies, may as well strike in with the Pharisees, and ascribe the Miracles of Christ to the Devil. And thus having shewn both what ought to be meant by Praying by the Spirit, and what cannot be meant, let us now see whether a set Form or this great extempore Way be the greatest hinderer or stinter of the Spirit. In order to which I shall lay down these three Assertions:

1. That

1. That the Soul or Mind of Man cannot supply two Faculties at the same Time to the same Height of Operation. 2. That the Words and Expressions for Prayer is the proper Business of the Head and the Brain, and the finding Devotion and Affection to go along with these, is the Business of the Heart. 3. That this Devotion and Affection is indispensibly required in Prayer, as the principal and most essential Part of it, and in which the Spirituality of it does most properly consist.

Now, from these *Three* put together, this must naturally and necessarily follow, That Praying by the Spirit consists properly in that Affection and Devotion that the Heart exercises in Prayer; so whatsoever gives the Soul Scope and Liberty to exercise this Affection and Devotion, that does most effectually help and enlarge the Spirit of Prayer; and whatsoever diverts the Soul from imploving such Affection and Devotion, does most stint and hinder it. Accordingly let this be the Rule whereby to judge of the Efficacy of a set Form, and of the extempore Way. As for a set Form, in which the Words are prepared to our Hands, the Soul has nothing to do, but to attend to the Work of raising the Affections and Devotions to go along with these Words; so that all the Powers of the Soul are taken up in applying the Heart to this great Duty; and it is the Exercise of the Heart, that is truly and properly a Praying by the Spirit. On the contrary, in all extempore Prayer, the Powers and Faculties of the Soul are called off from dealing with the Heart and Affections, and that both in the Speaker and Hearer.

And *first*, For the Minister who utters such extempore

tempore Prayers, he is wholly imploying his Invention both to conceive Matter and to find Words and Expressions to cloath it: And since the Mind of Man is such, that it cannot vigorously exercise two Faculties at one and the same Time, it is certain, that while the Head is so much imployed, the Heart must be idle, or very little imployed: Nay, the Truth is, he is not praying at all, but studying; he is beating his Brain while he should be drawing out his Heart and Affections. And then, for the People that are to join with him, it is manifest, that they not knowing before Hand what the Minister will say, must as soon as they hear him presently busy their Minds, both to apprehend and understand the Meaning of what they hear, and judge whether it be fit to join and concur with him; and so by this Course, the People are put to study and imploy their apprehending and judging Faculties, while they should be exerting their Affections and Devotions: And by this Means, the Spirit of Prayer is stinted, as well in the Congregation as in the Minister: Which is a Truth so clear and self evident, that it needs no further Argument to demonstrate or make it out.

There are two Things indeed extremely hindred and stinted by a set Form of Prayer, and furthered and enlarged by the extempore Way, which undoubtedly is the true Cause why the former is so much decryed, and the latter so much extoll'd by the Men whom we are now pleading with. The first is Pride and Ostentation, the other, Faction and Sedition. As for Pride, I doubt not but the chief Design of such as use the extempore Way, is to amuse the unthinking Rabble with an Admiration of their Gifts. It would put *Lucifer* himself hard to it,
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to outvy the Pride of one of these pouring out his extempore Stuff amongst his ignorant, whining and factious Followers, listning to and applauding his copious Flow and Cant, with the ridiculous Accents of their impertinent Groans. The Truth is, extempore Prayer, when best and most dextrously performed, is nothing else but a Business of Invention and Wit, such as it is, and requires no more to it but a teeming Imagination, a bold Front and ready Expression, and deserves the same Commendation that extempore Verses, were it not a Matter too serious to be sudden upon, only with this Difference, that there is necessary to the one a competent Measure of Wit and Learning, whereas the other may be done with very little Wit, and no Learning at all.

And now, can any sober Person think it reasonable that the publick Devotions of a whole Congregation should be under the Conduct, and at the Mercy of a pert, empty, conceited Holder-forth, whose chief, if not sole Intent, is to vaunt his spiritual Clack? Whereas Prayer is a Duty that recommends itself to the Acceptance of God, by nothing so much as the profoundest Humility, and the lowest Esteem that one can possibly have of himself. Certainly the extemporizing Faculty is never more out of its Element than in the Pulpit; tho even here 'tis much more excusable in Sermon than in Prayer, because he addresses Man like himself, whom he therefore may make bold with, as no doubt for so doing he will also make bold with him. The peculiar Advantage attending all such sudden Conceptions, that as they are quickly born, so they quickly die, it being seldom known where the Speaker has
so

so very fluent an Invention, but the Hearer has the Gift of as fluent a Memory.

The other thing stinted and hindered by a *Set Form*, and so much befriended by the extempore Way, is Faction and Sedition; it has always been found an excellent Way of girding at the Government in Scripture-phraze: We all know the common Dialect in which the great Masters of this Art used to pray for the King, and which may pass for a more cleanlier and refined Way of libelling him in the Lord, as, *that God would turn his Heart, and open his Eyes*, as if he were a Pagan yet to be converted to Christianity, with many other sly, virulent and malicious Insinuations, which we may every other Day hear from those Mints of Treason and Rebellion, and for which some Princes and Governments would make them not only eat their Words, but the Tongue that spoke them too. In fine, let all their extempore Prayers be considered, and you shall find a Spirit of Pride, Faction and Sedition predominant in them all, the only Spirit which they pray by. I have insisted the more on this against extempore Prayer, being perswaded that this is the Devil's Master-piece, and prime Engine to ruin the Church; and therefore as a thing neither subservient to Religion, nor grounded upon Principles of Reason, nor suitable to the Practice of Antiquity, ought to be exploded and cast out of every sober and well ordered Church, or else it will throw out the Church. Whosoever can reconcile the Text to the Expediency, Decency or Usefulness of extempore Prayer, I shall acknowledge him a Man of greater Abilities and Parts of Mind than Solomon himself.